

Theory of Fear and Tear: A Consequence of Deterrence Failure

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Abstract

Conceptually, deterrence aims to prevent an adversary from planning and organizing acts of violence and war due to the fear of such consequences that it could ill afford. However, the terminology gained prominence only during the Cold War era with particular reference to the advent of nuclear weapons. This traditional meaning and concept of deterrence worked well between the Cold War adversaries because they understood its consequences, perhaps learned some lessons after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and did not engage directly in any military confrontations after the establishment of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). However, the two superpowers of the time: The United States (US), and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), continued to support their proxies to strive for supremacy in the international system established after the end of World War II. The situation dramatically changed with the demise of the Soviet Union as a competitive opponent, and the US-led Western alliance freely waged wars in different regions against Unequal Military Powers (UMPs), who did not have any worthwhile military strength and support and were destroyed by many superior forces. More so, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, all wars have been between the UMPs, where the US-led Western alliance destroyed Afghanistan and Iraq, and now Russia is following a similar strategy in Ukraine. Israel, on the other hand, has also adopted a similar strategy with far more vengeance, and leveling the ground at Gaza, against another UMP. This paper aims to highlight the need to re-define the term deterrence in the changed paradigm where the powerful states are adopting the strategy of fear and tear against the people of the target state which does not possess any worthwhile military structure and support, and that too for the actions of Non-State Actors (NSAs). Adopting inductive reasoning and qualitative analysis, this author intends to make people aware of the dangerous consequences of the theory of fear and tear as a military strategy, for both: the attackers and the victims.

Key Words: Wars, Conflicts, Deterrence, Fear and Tear, USA, Russia, Israel, Palestine, Non-State Actors (NSAs), Unequal military Powers (UMPs).

Introduction

The deterrence in its essence and value to overcome the adversary is as old as the warfare itself. However, the terminology became household with the introduction of nuclear weapons in the inventories of the superpowers during the Cold War era. Following the diktats of Bernard Brodie, it played a significant role in avoiding a direct military engagement between the two superpowers of the time: The United States (US), and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). And, once the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) was established, the two arch-rivals started to engage themselves in Arms Control and Disarmament Agreements and Treaties, to ensure that deliberate or accidental use of nuclear weapons is avoided. Hence, the doctrine of massive retaliation was quickly converted into a flexible response, and the Cold War ended without too much destruction on either side. However, except for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, at no stage during the Cold War, did any of the superpowers ever annihilate an Unequal Military Power (UMP). The situation dramatically changed since the end of the Cold War, and the US-led alliances got a free hand to destroy several UMPs, regardless of the reasons and justifications. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, all wars have been between the UMPs, where the US-led Western alliance destroyed Afghanistan and Iraq, and now Russia is following a similar strategy in Ukraine. Israel, on the other hand, has adopted an even more aggressive approach to the fear and strategy, and with far more vengeance by leveling the ground at Gaza, against another UMP.

Central Argument

The relatively more powerful states have redefined deterrence by adopting an extremely harsh and unproportionate response to the acts of violence against them. The theory of '*fear and tear*' as coined by this author is now being manifested as a military strategy where the powerful destroy UMPs for a perceived failure of deterrence, even for the acts of Non-State Actors (NSAs).

Significance of the Study

The 21st-century wars have devastated several countries in the Middle East and South Asia, and now Europe is facing a similar situation with the Russia-Ukraine war well into its second year. There is a need to create awareness and perhaps a stop to such violent responses by the powerful states against the relatively weaker states particularly for acts of NSAs. The significance of the study cannot be overemphasized because it is aimed at averting the next war against UMPs.

Research Methodology

Inductive reasoning is deployed by this author in introducing a new theory of fear and tear after studying the 21st-century wars between the UMPs. Moreover, a qualitative analysis based on the narrative of events and their outcomes will be carried out. For the study, this author has developed a theoretical appraisal MODEL, which will help in determining the motives, options, diplomacy, economy, and legal avenues of such a harsh response by the powerful nations against UMPs.

Literature Review

The Cold War literature on deterrence was refreshed to draw pertinent lessons and relate the bigger power's strategy of massive retaliation against the relatively smaller nations against its essentiality of using it against another superpower of the time.

Lawrence Freedman¹ provides an extremely useful summary of nuclear strategic thought in the post-Cold War era. Scott D. Sagan² points out the gravity of the situation in South Asia due to nuclear weapons proliferation. He thinks that the deterrence may fail. Sagan challenges proliferation, optimists.³ On the other hand, Kenneth Waltz, the nuclear optimist has proffered that 'more is better.'⁴ Waltz argues for the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapon states, primarily because of the efficacies of nuclear deterrence.⁵ Pakistan benefits from the optimists' point of view on the subject. Moreover, Waltz's question to warring nations, "Why fight if you can't win much

¹Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan; Third Edition, October, 2003).

²See Scott D. Sagan, "The Perils of Proliferation in South Asia," in *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, ed. Scott D. Sagan (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

³Proliferation Optimists led by Kenneth Waltz are of the view that nuclear capable states are less likely to engage themselves in physical violence.

⁴See Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better," *Adelphi Papers*, Number 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981).

⁵See Scott D. Sagan, and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

and might lose everything?"⁶ needs to be understood by both India and Pakistan. Waltz's arguments are of immense interest to this research to support this author's argument that military engagements between the UMPs will only cause deaths, destruction, and devastation for the relatively weaker states and still be counterproductive for the attackers.

Theoretical Precepts

To coin a theory in the domain of wars and conflicts, it is necessary to understand the bigger power's behavior and the precepts of classical realism. Likewise, the deterrence regime will also be studied in detail to determine the avenues of its failures and possible consequences. An effort will be made to explore options for the relatively weaker states when they are faced with a losing war against a relatively bigger power.

Realism

Realism forms the basic theoretical construct of this research. Realism in its many shades; political, structural, or neo-realism with further explanations by Waltz's defensive realism and Mearsheimer's offensive realism helped develop an understanding of the complexities of great powers' behavior and unproportioned response against UMPs.

The international realm is anarchic. It consists of independent political units called states,⁷ which are the primary actors. All states maintain certain levels of offensive military capability which may be perceived as potentially dangerous by other states.⁸ Hence, states remain unsure about the intentions of other states and continue to enhance their power base to remain sovereign. However, most states think rationally and consolidate themselves to survive in the anarchic environment.⁹ Realism has its roots in the era of Thucydides¹⁰ and Chanakya Kautilya,¹¹ ably proffered by

⁶Ibid.

⁷Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and approaches*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 60. Also see <http://www.irtheory.com/know.htm>. Accessed July 29, 2014.

⁸See Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1948) Chapters 1 and 2.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Thucydides, ancient Greek historian famous for his account of the Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta (431-404 BC).

¹¹Kautilya, a minister of Maurya emperor of India, who authored seminal 'Arthashastra' which serves as the beacon of India's external policy over many centuries.

Machiavelli¹² in the Middle Ages, Thomas Hobbes¹³ in the seventeenth Century, and Hans Morgenthau¹⁴ in the previous century.

Deterrence

The concept of deterrence in the domain of wars and conflict is as primitive as the warfare itself. However, it needs to be understood before it is relied upon as a primary tool for the security of a state. In modern times the concept, and the definitions, draw reference to the birth of nuclear weapons in 1945. Bernard Brodie was of the view that “if aggressor feared retaliation in kind, he would not attack.”¹⁵ Explaining further, Brodie wrote, “Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them.”¹⁶

The traditional meaning of deterrence mainly focused on the cost-benefit analysis; capability, intent, and communication remained the most vital pillars of the concept of deterrence, and perhaps would remain so in the future. The concept of deterrence served its efficacy by preventing the two superpowers: the US and the USSR from directly engaging themselves in an armed conflict during the entire Cold War era. However, the traditional meaning of deterrence seems to have lost its relevance in the India-Pakistan context where both the nuclear states continue to engage themselves in acts of subversion, propaganda, sabotage, alleged support for extremism and terrorism, preparation for limited war, military standoff, and sub-conventional warfare, etc.

This traditional meaning and concept of deterrence served its purpose in letter and spirit between the Cold War rivals: The United States (US) and the erstwhile Soviet Union (USSR), because they understood its consequences and perhaps learned some lessons after the Cuban Missile Crisis¹⁷ of

¹²Niccolo Machiavelli, in ‘The Prince’ (1532) laid great emphasis on the manifestation of power, and interests in managing the affairs of the state.

¹³Thomas Hobbes, an English political philosopher whose famous book *Leviathan* established social contract theory in 1651.

¹⁴Hans Joachim Morgenthau, a leading scholar of international politics, developed the theory of political realism. His landmark work *Politics Among Nations*, was first published in 1948.

¹⁵ Bernard Brodie, “*The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and the World Order*,” Institute of International, Studies, Yale University, 1946. Accessed November 15, 2013.

¹⁶ Bernard Brodie, “The Atomic Bomb and American Security,” Yale Institute of International Studies, Occasional Paper no. 18, (Fall 1945). See also an expanded version of this paper in Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1946).

¹⁷ Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 are considered as the most dangerous situation where the Cold War rivals: US and USSR came close to nuclear war over the employment of Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) by the Soviets in Cuba.

1962. Thereafter, the two superpowers of the time never clashed with each other directly and continued to exercise their military power in wars, conflicts, and crises through the proxies.

Without going into the era of nuclear opacity in South Asia, if one looks at a little over the past two decades of nuclearized period, we find the efficacy of nuclear deterrence undermined on several occasions. Soon after the nuclear tests of May 1998, first by India and then by Pakistan, military engagement on Kargil Heights took the world by surprise, and Kashmir at once was declared a nuclear flashpoint by none other than US President Bill Clinton.¹⁸ Kargil was the first direct military engagement between two nuclear-armed states since the Ussuri River skirmishes in March 1969 between China and the erstwhile Soviet Union (USSR).¹⁹ However, the Kargil conflict was far more intense and dangerous than the Sino-Soviet border clashes, perhaps to the level of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 between the US and USSR, when a nuclear war was perhaps minutes away. Noam Chomsky quotes Clawson that '26 October was "when the nation was closest to nuclear war."²⁰

This author thinks that if you are threatening a five times bigger adversary in the conventional domain, you will use nuclear weapons as a last means of defense, which means you have indicated your nuclear threshold and thereby diluted the effects of deterrence. This is what was stated by Manpreet also:

Nuclear weapons cannot obviate wars but can change their complexion and influence the manner of their conduct. To keep nuclear weapons from entering into real warfare, it is important to intelligently judge an adversary's nuclear thresholds and to calibrate one's conventional strikes. For India, the exploration of this space is particularly important to deny Pakistan a free hand to indulge in sub-conventional conflict even as it holds the threat of an all-out nuclear war against an Indian conventional response.²¹

¹⁸ K. N. Pandita, "On Kashmir nuclear flash-point," Accessed January 8, 2021.

<http://www.kashmir-information.com/KNPandita/article1.html>.

¹⁹ The Sino-Soviet border conflict was a seven-month military conflict between the Soviet Union and China at the height of the Sino-Soviet split in 1969.

²⁰ Noam Chomsky, "Cuban missile crisis: how the US played Russian roulette with nuclear war."

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/15/cuban-missile-crisis-russian-roulette> (accessed January 8, 2021.)

²¹ Manpreet Sethi (2009) Conventional War in the Presence of Nuclear Weapons, Strategic Analysis, 33:3, 415-425, Published online: 06 Jun 2009,

According to Henry Kissinger,

Deterrence is the attempt to keep an opponent from adopting a certain course of action by posing risks which will seem to him out of proportion to any gains to be achieved.... The higher the stakes, the more absolute must be the threat of destruction which faces him... But, the reverse is also true; the smaller the objective, the less should be the sanction.²²

Defining Fear and Tear

Before explaining the theory of fear and tear, it is necessary to understand the elements, factors, assumptions, and perceptions of the two terms: fear and tear. The feeling of fear in any living being is a natural phenomenon. The fear could be due to the physical threat of losing life and property, or in the psychosocial domain for losing a job, or stature in the society. The enemy can achieve its objective of creating fear in an individual (leadership), community (armed forces), or the people through various methods. For instance, a relatively stronger state can create fear among the leadership of a relatively weaker state through strategic communication containing threats of dire consequences in the wake of the failure to comply. The US President George W. Bush's statement that "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,"²³ in the GWOT is an example of effective strategic communication. Likewise, similar warnings to President Musharraf of Pakistan for seeking support against the Taliban-led Afghanistan government proved very effective.

The factors that help in creating fear include the credibility of instruments that are used to create fear. The credibility of the person is based on his ability and intent, which are supported by historical evidence, military capacity, national interest, and perhaps his desire to acquire more power. In the 21st-century wars against UMPs, it is visible that what the leadership of the US, Russia, and Israel say means it, hence strengthening the credibility of their strategic

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09700160902790100?scroll=top&needAccess=true>,
(accessed December 27, 2020).

²² Henry A Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 96.

²³ President George W. Bush, in an address to a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001.

communication. President Bush in Afghanistan and Iraq, President Putin in Ukraine, and Prime Minister Netanyahu in Gaza are a few examples.

Explaining the Theory of Fear and Tear

The purpose of referring to the US and Israeli strategy of retaliation and revenge as the theory of fear and tear is to highlight the disproportionality of the use of force against UMPs. The fear part denotes the concept of deterrence, whereas the aspects of tear reflect the disproportionate consequences of its failure.

The essence of the concept of deterrence essentially lies in keeping the offenders at bay, reducing their numbers in society, and minimizing the damage. Moreover, states aimed at insisting on the abidance of law, because it threatened them that it could punish the violators beyond their comprehension, and they will not be able to bear the losses that may be caused by the state due to their undesirable acts. However, the state never applied this principle across the board and remained careful in its application against the defaulters only.

Once the concept of deterrence became applicable to interstate relations, it still did not mean that the opponent would be annihilated, particularly once the MAD was established. The states used the concept of deterrence primarily to avoid major wars, either by design or by accidents and miscalculations, particularly for acts of the Non-State Actors (NSAs). However, the concept of deterrence seems to have been redefined by the powerful states, particularly against the relatively smaller and weaker states. The 21st-century wars have all been between the UMPs in which the stronger powers destroyed the relatively weaker states and left them with exhaustive lists of political, social, economic, and diplomatic puzzles to solve.

The theory of fear and tear offers no incentives or assurances to the target state and hence does not leave with any option but to face the consequences of being torn apart without waiting for a worthwhile investigation of the alleged crime.

This author has developed a theoretical tool to evaluate the theory of fear and tear, adopted as a military strategy by the relatively stronger states against the UMPs. This theoretical tool has been acronymized as MODEL (Motives, Options, Diplomacy, Economy, and Legal). Each of these elements of MODEL is discussed briefly to understand the logic of destroying UMPs as a

consequence of the perceived failure of deterrence or non-compliance of good orders by the regional hegemons. For this study, only 21st-century wars will be evaluated on this MODEL.

Motives. Nations do not war without specific politico-military objectives, because war is a serious business in which both men and materials are faced with a high degree of probability of deaths and destruction. Therefore, it is extremely important to understand the motives behind a militarily strong state to attack and nearly annihilate a much weaker state to claim victory.

On August 30, 2023, the US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J. Austin, III, stated, “The United States went to Afghanistan in 2001 to wage a necessary war of self-defense. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorists attacked our country. They were able to plan and execute such a horrific attack because their Taliban hosts had given them safe haven in Afghanistan.”²⁴ Furthermore, “The United States' vital national interest in Afghanistan is to ensure the country is never again used as a safe haven from which terrorists can attack the United States, or our Allies or interests abroad.”²⁵

Another 21st-century war between UMPs was the Second Iraq War launched by the US-led International Coalition on March 20, 2003. The noble purpose of this war was “to disarm the country of weapons of mass destruction, end Saddam Hussein’s support for terrorism, and free the Iraqi people from the repressive regime.”²⁶

The politico-military objectives of the US-led International Coalition against Iraq were further explained by General Tommy Franks,

"First, end the regime of Saddam Hussein. Second, to identify, isolate, and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Third, to search for, to capture, and to drive out terrorists from that country. Fourth, to collect such intelligence as we can be related to terrorist networks. Fifth, to collect such intelligence as we can related to the global network of illicit weapons of

²⁴ Lloyd J. Austin, III, Message to the Force - One Year Since the Conclusion of the Afghanistan War Aug. 30, 2022 <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3144082/message-to-the-force-one-year-since-the-conclusion-of-the-afghanistan-war/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20went%20to,them%20safe%20haven%20in%20Afghanistan>. (accessed December 20, 2023)

²⁵ Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, Report to Congress, July 1, 2020.

²⁶ The Important Facts about War, Imperial War Museums (IWM), <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-important-facts-about-the-iraq-war/#:~:text=On%20the%20March%202003%2C%20a,people%20from%20his%20repressive%20regime>. (accessed December 20, 2023).

mass destruction. Sixth, to end sanctions and to immediately deliver humanitarian support to the displaced and many needy Iraqi citizens. Seventh, to secure Iraq's oil fields and resources, which belong to the Iraqi people. And last, to help the Iraqi people create conditions for a transition to a representative self-government."²⁷

However, Farzana is of the view that the real objectives of the US-led Coalition for Iraq's invasion were "safeguarding Israeli security, which is the main US ally in the region; as well as to have total physical control of the oil resources in the region, thus securing for the US a dominant role in the formulation of global energy policies,"²⁸

Even if Farzana's assertions are baseless, as the oil argument has been refuted by the US, the fact remains that the WMDs were not found in Iraq.

Options. Once the UMPs are faced with a higher probability of an attack by a relatively stronger opponent, the options with a relatively smaller and weaker state are usually limited. However, states strive to protect their territorial integrity and sovereignty at any cost. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate all the available options to ward off the imminent threat posed by a stronger military.

However, in 21st-century wars, the relatively weaker were left with virtually no options when the attacks or invasions were conducted by the US-led allies, either in Afghanistan or Iraq. There were no Afghans involved in the 9/11 attacks, however, Afghanistan was razed to the ground and kept under forced occupation for two decades. Likewise, a total control and destruction of Iraq's infrastructure, the US-led allies could not find the alleged WMDs, however, one of their main objectives was achieved: removal and elimination of Saddam Hussein, for which the Iraqis paid a heavy price through deaths, destruction, and devastation.

Diplomacy. Perhaps, diplomacy remains the most prudent option with relatively smaller and militarily weaker states to avoid a war or a conflict of a serious nature. To ensure enduring peace and stability in the region, it is incumbent upon all the regional states to try to avert an impending war due to its disastrous consequences for the entire region. However, the two cases deliberated in this study: Afghanistan and Iraq, were in an entirely

²⁷ Michelle Sale, "Missions Accomplished?". *The New York Times*, April 11, 2003.

²⁸ Farzan Noshab, The Control Of Oil: The Real Objective Of US Invasion Of Iraq?, Vol. 23, No. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE (Summer 2003), pp. 85-101.

different situation at the time of invasion. The Taliban-led Afghanistan government was only recognized by three states at the time: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. Hence, they had very limited options available on the diplomatic front to avert a war, which was more of a revenge than a self-defense war. On the other hand, Iraq was still under Saddam Hussein who had survived the first Iraq War of 1991. Moreover, the charges of holding WMDs were too serious to be ignored, because the Global War on Terror (GWOT) was already in progress in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, negative diplomacy was deployed in both of these wars. Diplomacy served as a tool to gather support for war instead of peace and that too without any substantial evidence of charges against the two much weaker states.

Economy. Wars bring deaths, destruction, and devastation with very little probability of lasting peace in the region. It not only destroys the infrastructure of the target state but also the neighboring states. The economy of both; the attacker and the target states are faced with numerous challenges, and most of the time has dire consequences for the entire region. The US spent over USD 2.0 Trillion in Afghanistan in over two decades due to which its economy is faced with mounting debt. However, its Military Industrial Complex (MIC) thrives on wars and conflicts and takes the major share of military budgets for war. On the other hand, the economies of the target states were destroyed due to prolonged wars. Iraq may still recover in the medium term, by Afghanistan will take much longer due to a lack of resources and infrastructure. Moreover, two years have passed since the hasty withdrawal of the US, but only one country; China has officially recognized the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan, while the rest of the states are still sitting on the fence.

Legal. The United Nations was established primarily to ensure an international order which will enable peace and security in the world. The international organization's main purpose was to "Maintain International Peace and Security. Protect Human Rights. Deliver Humanitarian Aid. Support Sustainable Development and Climate Action."²⁹ However, there has been no break from the wars and conflicts, particularly for the relatively

²⁹ The United Nations was established in 1945, and now has grown to 193-member states.

<https://www.un.org/en/our-work#:~:text=Maintain%20International%20Peace%20and%20Security,Sustainable%20Development%20and%20Climate%20Action> (accessed December 2023).

smaller and weaker states, either from the regional hegemons or from the global powers. In the ongoing Israeli offensive on Gaza, in response to Hamas's actions on October 7, 2023, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has failed to adopt a ceasefire resolution due to the US veto on each occasion. The international body has become so weak that it cannot reach a consensus to stop the war against UMPs, and let the powerful continue with the genocide of the poor and unarmed civilians including women and children.

Conclusion

The theory of fear and tear adopted by the relatively powerful nations against UMPs as a military strategy has redefined the concept of deterrence. Essentially, deterrence meant to warn the potential adversary of the consequences that would outweigh the gains, however, it always carried some incentives to enhance the probability of its effectiveness. Unfortunately, the powerful states have deployed the theory of fear and tear as part of their military strategy to annihilate the weaker opponent, which is an extremely serious situation for a stable international system.

The purpose of coining the theory of fear and tear, particularly if it is employed as a military strategy against UMPs is to highlight the consequences for global security in general and regional security in particular. The 21st-century wars are already seeing the outcomes of fear and tear of the relatively weaker and smaller states by the more powerful adversaries. These outcomes are extremely dreadful for the people of the target countries, particularly for the non-combatants, women, and children of these states.

The US and Israel have already followed this strategy of fear and tear, since the beginning of this century, and Russia might follow suit if it decides to upscale the military in Ukraine. Perhaps the relatively more powerful states have already redefined deterrence by adopting an extremely harsh and unproportioned response.

To conclude, it is recommended that the theory of fear and tear be debated by academia and practitioners to create awareness among the stakeholders about the consequences of such a massive reaction which annihilates a relatively weaker and smaller state. The unarmed and non-combatants including women and children suffer the most from such revengeful acts of the powerful states. The purpose is to avert the next war between UMPs anywhere in the world.

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